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ABSTRACT

The Office of Desegregation of the Little Rock, Arkansas, Public School District was given the responsibility for developing an instrument to evaluate the implementation of educational equity in the district pursuant to federal court desegregation mandates. Office of Desegregation personnel invited in Center for Academic Excellence staff of the University of Central Arkansas to collaborate in constructing the instrument. After outlining the goals of the endeavor, the team agreed to the formation of a committee to be balanced by sex, race, and representation from teachers, students, parents, and administrators. An instrument, the "Building Level Assessment for Multicultural and Nonsexist Education," was obtained from the Midwest Race and Sex Desegregation Assistance Center of the College of Education of Kansas State University. The general committee and the ten subcommittees comprising it met to consider the document and additions, deletions, and other modifications of it. After a series of meetings the form was approved and submitted to the district staff for their use. The spirit of collaboration, openness, autonomy, and balance contributed to a very positive effort by the many committee members. (Author/SLD)

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A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING A MEASURE OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

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Abstract

The Office of Desegregation of the Little Rock, Arkansas, Public School District was given the responsibility for developing an instrument to evaluate the implementation of educational equity in the district pursuant to federal court desegregation mandates. Office of Desegregation personnel invited in Center for Academic Excellence staff of the University of Central Arkansas to collaborate in constructing the instrument. After outlining the goals of the endeavor, the team agreed to the formation of a committee to be balanced by sex, race, and representation from teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

An instrument was obtained from the Midwest Race and Sex Desegregation Assistance Center of the College of Education of Kansas State University. The general committee and the ten subcommittees comprising it met to consider the document and additions, deletions, and other modifications of it. After a series of meetings the form was approved and submitted to the district staff for their use.

The spirit of collaboration, openness, autonomy, and balance contributed to a very positive effort by the many committee members.

A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING A MEASURE OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Introduction

The Office of Desegregation of the Little Rock, Arkansas, Public School District was assigned the responsibility for developing an instrument to evaluate the implementation of educational equity in the district pursuant to federal court desegregation mandates. In February, 1987, the Assistant Superintendent for Desegregation/Human Relations and Federal Programs and an Evaluation and Testing Specialist of the District invited the Director and Assistant Director for Research and Evaluation of the Center for Academic Excellence of the University of Central Arkansas to collaborate in constructing the instrument, which was to be implemented in the Fall school term. Center staff were to provide leadership and supervision for the project.

Instrument search

After outlining the equity goals of the endeavor, both offices initiated searches for existing instruments suitable for measuring educational equity. An assessment tool prepared by The Midwest Race and Sex Desegregation Assistance Center of The College of Education of Kansas State University in Manhattan (January, 1983) was located after an extensive effort, by early March. The instrument, entitled "Building Level Assessment for Multicultural and Nonsexist Education", consisted of

an item bank arranged into ten categories, sample questionnaires, and data analysis strategies. The Director of the Center graciously consented to allow the use of the materials.

Superintendent support

Shortly after locating the Assistance Center assessment tool, the evaluation team met with the Little Rock School District Superintendent who voiced his support for the plans of the team for measuring educational equity in the district's fifty-one schools.

Steering committee

As a first step in this process the evaluation team agreed to the formation of a steering committee to be balanced by sex, race, and representation from teachers, students, parents, and administrators from the magnet schools, specialty schools, Little Rock School District schools, and Pulaski County School District schools which had been recently merged with the Little Rock District. The initial committee was composed of eleven members: an elementary teacher, principal, and parent; a junior high teacher, principal, and parent; a senior high teacher, principal, and two senior high students; all selections balanced by race and sex. The eleventh member was the Administrative Assistant to the Manager of Support Services who was to assume the role of Associate Superintendent for Desegregation after funding for the position was assured. The original evaluation team became nonvoting facilitators to encourage committee autonomy.

The committee was convened in early April and charged by the Assistant Superintendent for Evaluation and Testing, representing the Superintendent, with developing a plan or process to be used to measure educational equity. To be ready for the Fall term, the plan was to be presented to the school board for its July meeting, the last Thursday of the month. The plan then was to be submitted to the federal judge for his approval, after which the committee's work was to be considered complete.

Role of the Center for Academic Excellence

The role of the Center for Academic Excellence was explained to the committee by the Director of the Center. He explained that the Center staff involved were working only as consultants, free of charge to the district, courtesy of The College of Education of the University of Central Arkansas.

Instrument development

Next, the Committee was presented with the Midwest Race and Sex Desegregation Assistance Center materials. It was emphasized that the instrument was offered only as a catalyst for the development of a measure for local use. The committee was assured that it had complete freedom to do whatever was needed to complete its work.

It was suggested that a possible direction for the committee to take in implementing its task would be to complement its ranks with representatives from schools not represented in its present membership.

Selecting, again, from students, parents, patrons, teachers, and principals, that would bring the total count to fifty-one, one member for each of the district's schools. Then, since the Assistance Center's item bank was divided into ten areas, each of the ten school representatives could head a subcommittee of approximately five members, each with the charge of developing questions for that area. The committee was asked to consider the proposal until the next meeting at which time it could decide to pursue it or not.

Committee officers, a chair, cochair, and a secretary, were then approved from volunteers. Representation included a parent, a teacher, a principal, two whites, and a black.

The next meeting was held later in April. The Committee first discussed the name of the instrument and decided to call it the Little Rock School District Desegregation Plan Evaluative Criteria.

The Committee also discussed the merits of the Assistance Center material and decided to use the instrument as a model, retaining the ten categories. The Committee also chose to develop subcommittees as proposed at the previous meeting. The subcommittees were charged with reviewing the questions in their areas and then deciding to retain, rewrite, or eliminate as deemed appropriate. The first meeting for this purpose, involving the fifty-one members, was held in early May. At this time, it was discovered that to include equal representation of both students and schools, that more senior high students would have to be selected since younger students would not be appropriate selections.

Additional members were added, bringing the total to sixty-four. The new members were brought up to date during the next meeting, a week later. The activities of the prior meeting were replicated for their benefit, providing equal opportunities for the schools they represented. After another week, the full complement of sixty-four representatives were invited to review the revised assessment tool for changes or comments.

The last week of May, the steering committee met to finalize the instrument. A few finishing touches were suggested. The group then voted to allow the District Evaluation and Testing Office to make necessary adjustments and refinements. It was moved and approved that the surveys be administered in late February to randomly selected students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Also, the District Evaluation/Testing staff were approved to edit the survey on the basis of evaluation findings.

Since the committee had fulfilled its obligation relative to the development of a measure of educational equity for the Little Rock School District, it was thereby concluded.

The spirit of collaboration, openness, autonomy, and balance contributed to a very positive effort on the part of the many committee members. The value of this spirit in dealing with a sensitive topic like combining desegregation and evaluation was manifested in the development of an instrument within a limited time frame and limited resources, yet acceptable to groups representing diverse sociometric, sex, age, position, and multicultural perspectives.